

First record of Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* for St. Helena, South Atlantic

Annalea Beard

Première mention du Héron pourpré *Ardea purpurea* pour l'île de Sainte-Hélène, Atlantique Sud.
Le 25 octobre 2009 un Héron pourpré *Ardea purpurea* juvénile a été capturé dans le cours d'eau à New Bridge, Upper Jamestown, Sainte-Hélène. L'oiseau a été examiné et photographié avant d'être relâché. Il s'agit de la première donnée pour Sainte-Hélène.

On 25 October 2009 at c.08.00 hrs I was alerted by Mr R. Joshua to a strange bird that he had caught in the stream at New Bridge, Upper Jamestown (15°55'49"S 05°42'55"W). Upon examining the bird I identified it as an immature heron. As there are no resident herons on St. Helena, and the only regular visitor is Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* (Rowlands *et al.* 1998, McCulloch 2004), I took a description and Mr E. Thorpe photographed the bird so that identification and ageing could be verified at a later date. Following examination the bird was released into Cambrian House garden, Jamestown, where I observed it for several minutes (Fig. 1). It was not seen again.

The bird was significantly larger than a Cattle Egret but smaller than a Grey Heron *Ardea*

cinerea, which is a rare accidental visitor to St. Helena (Rowlands *et al.* 1998). It had a chestnut-brown crown with a few slate-grey feathers on its forehead. The bill was yellowish with a grey tip, and the irides were yellow. The chin and foreneck were white. The throat and breast were pale buff streaked dark brown (Fig. 2). The upperparts were chestnut-brown and the wing-coverts had distinct buff fringes (Fig. 3). The legs and feet were grey in front and yellowish behind.

The bird was identified as an immature Purple Heron *A. purpurea*. Confirmation of the identification was obtained from B. Rowlands (pers. comm.), who also stated that this was a new record for the island. During the non-breeding season, Purple Heron is widely distributed



Figures 1–3. Immature Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, St. Helena, 25 October 2009 (Edward Thorpe)
Héron pourpré *Ardea purpurea* juvénile, Sainte-Hélène, 25 octobre 2009 (Edward Thorpe)

over sub-Saharan Africa with isolated records from coastal Namibia (Hockey *et al.* 2005); the subspecies *A. p. purpurea* breeds across parts of mainly southern Europe and western Asia (Kushlan & Hancock 2005). It therefore seems probable that this bird reached St. Helena on the south-east trade winds.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Robert Joshua for catching the bird, Edward Thorpe for providing the photographs, Beau Rowlands for confirming the record and commenting on this note, and Neil McCulloch for reviewing it.

References

Hockey, P. A. R., Dean, W. R. J. & Ryan, P. G. (eds.) 2005. *Roberts—Birds of Southern Africa*. Seventh

edn. Cape Town: Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund.

Kushlan, J. A. & Hancock, J. A. 2005. *The Herons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McCulloch, N. 2004. *A Guide to the Birds of St Helena and Ascension Island*. Sandy: The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Rowlands, B. W., Trueman, T., Olson, S. L., McCulloch, M. N. & Brooke, R. K. 1998. *The Birds of St Helena: An Annotated Check-list*. BOU Check-list No. 16. Tring: British Ornithologists' Union.

Heathfield, Dewlands Common, Verwood, Dorset BH31 6JL, UK. E-mail: annaleamichellebeard@yahoo.co.uk

Received 22 March 2012; revision accepted 31 May 2012.